Poetry Quarterly

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Editorial

It is entirely normal that new movements, new directions in literature should create disturbance reactions of pained surprise from those who have come to regard themselves as the reigning deities. That there are only two kinds of verse, good poetry and the rest, we agree. But to ignore the *zeitgeist*, the sprit of this our day with its often very considerable change in content, technique, accent of contemporary verse is mere peevish trifling. Every decade has its own language, words it will use and whole regions of thought which are rigorously taboo. To ignore the fact that there has been a change in tendencies since 1940 is wilful blindness. Neo-Romanticism and the Apocalyptics have tinged the literary scene with colour and richness and hope. They are not afraid to show that they have feelings. They stand in absolute and irreconcileable contrast to the dessicated despair, honest niggling and brazen rather bawdy cynicism of the pre-war decade. The literary history of the thirties, when it comes to be written will be found to be extremely interesting and rich in development of its own gifts even if it has to record the ingrowing tendencies of the time and the turning away of the general reading public from poetry as the sport of "highbrows," full of a disconcerting humour they did not really appreciate at all. Its great figures who are still young by other than adolescent standards will continue to produce good work, continue to develop. But it is undeniable

that the influence of Dylan Thomas and Henry Treece is as great on this generation as the impact of Hopkins was on a former one. For some time we shall be receiving in our mailbag MSS stamped with the mark of Auden, even some as we do now of pre-Eliot vintage. They will become fewer and fewer, gradually joining the little throng who still live in the shadow of William Watson and Alfred, Lord Tennyson, not yet across the bar.

G. S. Fraser

To Apollo

(*From the Italian of Gabriel D'Annunzio's translation of the Greek*).

Phoebus, thee still the winging swan his sweetest sings
From our near bank who soars to dizzying Peneus;
Thee the priest always, sweetly the lyre touching
And soft hymns raising, first and lastly singeth.
And Lord, all hail; with this I too appease thee.

Rainer Maria Rilke

The Poet.

The hour slips from me: wingbeats of the hour
Wound me and take my peace away.
I am alone. Yet what strange power
Inhabits all my life, my night, my day?
Unhoused and loverless I live
In no sure place, lacking all centre:
I give myself, and as I give
Possess the world by that surrender.
Reaching through railings and fingering the stones
Of these expended, unprojected graves:
The soil's a flirt, the lion Time is tamed,
And pain like a cat will come home to share your room.

(*Translated by Sidney Keyes*).

James Kirkup

Prophesy: 1942

The Waters under the earth that are always
rising or subsiding,
The waters are up, and the tips of the waves are
broken open: they speak.

The blood drained from the broken bodies
of a green-leaved youth in springtime uprooted,
thrown on the roads,
trampled by traffic to
rot now in the sun,
reddens the threat, the flood that laps at the trapdoor.

No distant disaster disturbs the ripple
of housekeeping and tea:
none dare break away, or say,
but in silence each has accepted a part in the play.

In slow gentility the show began,
moving thro' many acts faster till
on scenes of surreality dawn spread.
But the curtains are drawn, and the doors have been
locked,
and while some of the watchers sleep
others are shouting, fisted arms waved wildly.
The play that was never written has no end,
no plan, no meaning; all are invited on the stage.

The crowd flows down the gangways, looking for life;
the orchestra with syncopated anthems
accompanies a tragic football match.

The waters are up: they are licking the feet
of a few at high tide.
The dawn has spread, the white wings of the sun
are lifted toward day.

Roy McFadden

For Retired Rebels

Where is the lean tight flame of faith,
The vision greater than the four-walled self,
The naked vision bare as death,
Lean. tight and pointed as the moon-trapped wolf?

Must time for ever put grey hairs
On ageing, plump ideals; must the eyes
Come pointless, and the open doors
Clash shutting in the men suckled to mice?

So from the schooled and servile hand
The ledger column sprawls and crucifies
The out-of-time, who will not bend
To burn the incense, bed with compromise.

So in the streets no eyes are turned
Upward to mountains or to passing eyes,
Self-wrapped, aloof, all trebly learned
In cautious counting and safe sacrifice.

O let the clothes drop off, and grass
Flame through the flattened streets, and blossoms fall
Snow-like from the gantries. Pass
From blood and money, and the four-walled hell.

Sydney D. Tremayne

Hell

I have opened a window in hell
And looked into the night,
The cool night unattainable.

The moon was a disc of sheer ice
Burned through a cloth
Of shell blue, undefilable.

I have opened a window in hell
And looked into the night,
The cool night, unendurable.

Vernon Watkins

Music of Colours—White Blossom

White blossom, white, white shell; the Nazarene
Walking in the ear; white touched by souls
Who know the music by which white is seen,
Blinding white, from strings and aureoles,
Until that is not white, seen at the two poles,
Nor white the Scythian hills, nor Marlowe's queen.

The spray looked white until this snowfall.
Now the foam is grey, the wave is dull.
Call nothing white again, we were deceived.
The flood of Noah dies, the rainbow is lived.
Yet from the deluge of illusions an unknown colour is
saved.

White must die black, to be born white again
From the womb of sounds, the inscrutable grain,
From the crushed, dark fibre, breaking in pain.

The bud of the apple is already forming there.
The cherry-bud, too, is firm, and behind it the pear
Conspires with the racing cloud. I shall not look.
The rainbow is diving through the wide-open book
Past the rustling paper of birch, the sorceries of bark.

Buds in April, on the waiting branch,
Starrily opening, light raindrops drench,
Swinging from world to world when starlings sweep,
Where they alight in air, are white asleep.
They will not break, not break, until you say
White is not white again, nor may may.

White flowers die soonest, die into that chaste
Bride-bed of the moon, their lives laid waste.
Lilies of Solomon, taken by the gust,
Sigh, make way. And the dark forest
Haunts the lowly crib near Solomon's dust,
Rocked to the end of majesty, warmed by the low beast,
Locked in the liberty of his tremendous rest.

If there is white, or has been white, it must have been
When His eyes looked down and made the leper clean.
White will not be, apart, though the trees try
Spirals of blossom, their green conspiracy.
She who touched His garment saw no white tree.

Lovers speak of Venus, and the white doves,
Jubilant, the white girl, myth's whiteness, Jove's,
Of Leda, the swan, whitest of his loves.
Lust imagines him, web-footed Jupiter, great down
Of thundering light; love's yearning pulls him down
On the white swan-breast, the magical lawn,
Involved in plumage, mastered by the veins of dawn.

In the churchyard the yew is neither green nor black.
I know nothing of Earth or colour until I know I lack
Original white, by which the ravishing bird looks wan.
The mound of dust is nearer, white of mute dust that
dies
In the soundfall's great light, the music in the eyes,
Transfiguring whiteness into shadows gone,
Utterly secret. I know you, black swan.

H. B. Mallalieu

Movement Order

Hazel and oak, sere leaves among the green
With russet tint the rough grey of the sky.
Pools gather in deepened ruts where carts had been
Wheat-stacked when tracks were dry.

Thick with their copper drapery of ferns,
The hills absorb the autumn silent day.
Hawk treads the air; the half-wild pony turns
Morning draws the mist away.

Guns upon the switchback of these roads,
Ride with such purpose the roads cannot tame.
Our route strikes from the hills; war loads
With scars the fields through which we came.

Through waking villages and tree-fringed farms
We climbed as from last moments of a sleep,
To break at end upon a sentinel's alarms
Who saw the diving Stukas sweep.

Without that permanence creation gives
How should we share rock's peace and earth's content?
The harvester looks forward to the Spring; he lives
Native to time and I in banishment.

Norman Nicholson

The Tarn

I have heard crack the warning
Ice, alone,
By the uncertain track
Scotched on bare stone.

I have traversed the screes,
Been aware of
The cairn beyond the next cairn,
the menace in a sheep's cough;

The snaring bog.
The threat of nightfall,
The sniper's cue
In the snipe's call;

The whisper like a silence
In the hollow of the force
That booms over the cleft ledge
Bombarding its course.

The alert crag,
The skulking mist:
Is it behind that or this,
The clenched unflinching fist?

What is it?
What is there?
On startled heels
I challenge the blank air.

Stockstill. Take my bearings: I know
Every quarry in the valley, every chock
—stone in the gully, every gutter in the
ghyll . . . .
I do not know that rock.

I faltered;
Turned back.
Sought cover beside a dyke,
Or a friendly haystack.

Nor does the blarney of summer
Allay my doubt:
From the bright bracken
The snake looks out.

In the blue night sky
Above the bilberry knoll
The unthawed stars
Point to the wintry Pole.

I have fled to the lowlands,
Called my thoughts in;
Entrenched between houses
I have saved my skin.

But on the skyline
The gaunt fell
Taunts me with slate shoulders,
And I know well

I shall break this truce,
And one day again
I shall go to the tarn,
Black with rain;

The unknown I shall know
'Though how to do
May take all my living to learn
Or dying too.

Alan Rook

Casualty

Who can say at what time death took you;
the cold kiss of an indifferent bullet
surprised itself a billet in your heart?

Who can tell to what new
fantastic regions your enterprising spirit
reaches, or read the art

which teaches these Belgian nightingales
to count the seedless branches? Whilst alone
each of us seeks the morning

pale on his rifle; and these minutes steal
rain from the last darkness. O man!—
let me take home to England this burning

anxiety to anger! Let me forget
this inner pain of branches newly-cut!

Nicholas Moore

Death at Hand

I

We have most beautiful words to keep our minds
Clean, most ornate and costly gloves
To cover our tapering, dangerous fingers:
Any monument to keep us from the tomb.

Our monumental agonies we put
In headlines, speak no words of tombs,
But tell a wondering world how brave we are,
How courage saves us in the face of death!

But did these men look any death in the face?
They touched the surface with their costly gloves,
Careful never to look beyond the tomb,
Beyond the mere presence of a "beautiful" bomb.

Here a beautiful girl lies. Here a baby. Here
A drivelling dotard, driven from his deathbed
By the furious awakening of cold planes.
O we indeed, who are like these ones, should face them

And face their death. Are we not guilty too?
That we not died to keep them from the tomb,
That we not spoke to keep them from the bomb;
That we did nothing. What could our gloved hands do?

II

Death falls narrowly on a continent of desire:
We are pleased as punch, on our smirking faces lies
The self-deception of millions of pleasing lies:
We are gay. We were saved death by a hairsbreadth.
Now we return to the book and the lathe and the
battle.
The death of our friends has really cost us little.

If we are rich, we will put up marble halls,
We will hold balls, dance, and laugh merrily,
Saying, Thus she would have wished, who died merrily
That we continue as we did before, or if
We are poor we will take some pitiful flowers to her
grave;
That they may live for her beauty we could not save.

It is time is it not that we faced this serious fact,
Death in the sea, on the land, in the sky, the precious
Heroes dying for our famous ideals, precious
No more save to those mourners for them who
With their own lives intact continue daily
To do as they have done: to bear it gaily:

It is time indeed that we should face the future
Without the comfort of our beautiful gloves
Covering the sores on the hand, covering gloves
For the weals that fate has etched on our stupid minds:
These gloves are made to fit, but they cannot fit you
Who always carry additional agonies with you,

Always one more callous growing to change
The shape of your flesh. Death drives his hard nails in,
Like a carpenter, and the shape of your new grief
grows
Like a coffin. The ornate or plain wood covers
Efficiently every disaster you wish not to see.
Desire remains—to be as we used to be.

III

Yet there is perhaps a whisper or more than
A whisper, a mere intimation among agonies,
That those who care remain, and that they grow
More strong daily: for the people always care.

It is that the gloves, made to fit so beautifully,
Cover up with pretence the trembling and rarely
Beautiful core, that the tapering fingers
Of the sensitive mind cannot stretch beyond

The confines of the pattern; the ready-made hand
That holds its accepted "truth" above us all:—
That death is no tragedy, that all men die;
That they might as well die by a bomb as quietly.

Yes, it is possible, with death at hand, fear
Pervading the shuddering heart, to make this saving
Speech, to say, Lucky they did not get me today,
To mourn for those they got, but rejoice that some

Remain. Are we not guilty then? Did we
Not wish, lacking our own deaths, these fine deaths?
Did we not help to nail our own friends in?
My friends, O my friends, it is time we did do some-
thing.

There is no rejoicing that these have gone to the tomb.
What help if their names have struck the headlines?
We,
With our soft gloves, remain. They do not fit
The seriousness of the times. Let us love, then, and
face it.

Alex Comfort

Image of Venus

Imagine in this summer of growing berries
The shell of memory under this green bav
Lies in its idle light on level sand

Small winds of water crossing its cold lip
That never spoke but once--its delicate bands
Most like a python's but more polished, tracing
Imagined hills and music, under the wave's green rib

Pink as new skin, its smooth beaks feminine
The water's virgin fearing marriage.

This is the tranquil shell—too deeply sunk
For live man's fishing: its clear porcelain
Bred still too deep for diver, or the foam's long finger
The currents moving it daily a foot to shoreward . . .

Come the spring tides upon dry land I'll find
A means to open its long maidenhead.

Ellode Collins

The Bell

Dim, bronze-green, hung
In the hollow head of the spire,
Shaking no more starling's nests
With rings, waves, rays
Of sound; splintering no tongue
In praise of God.

Dust, mossed, roped,
Hung, nest-incrusted; rung
Not for spirits cloven, flesh cleaving.

No rust, cord frayed,
No fluttering bird lust shall stop
Rope and the clapper's thunder
Thongs burst; Bronze crack.
Peace float like a cloud on the steeple's
glittering cock.

John Bayliss

Reflection

Who, with only candlelight,
hears the tread of his own ghost;
in dark buildings walking late
meets the uninvited guest;
wonders what green shadows mean
where the two lights mix and wane
and the second image stands
ugly by the aching head;
or, in old bat-haunted church,
sees the painted angel glide
wingless through the unhallowed porch;
He who finds these phantoms here
is of that despairing guild
whose dim ancestry of fear
lets no woman long be fair,
finding insects in the gold
eating out the lovely hair.

In the ecstasy of sense
he can feel the skeleton
shaking at primeval sins
through the archway of the bone;
he can see stone letters form
on the wall above the bed
well can guess the date and name
of the soon-forgotten dead:
but no stone the carver shaped
nor chiselled verse, nor compliment
nor any magic of his own,
music, picture, monument,
can console him for her breath
his known trumpeter of death.

Cecily Mackworth

Song

I went out into the streets
When Spring was like a trumpet
I walked under the lilac trees
And under the chestnut branches
I trod the shrieking sun under my feet
And balanced the wind on my fingernail.

I took golden lemons in my hand
And tossed them up into the sky
Higher than the high Pyrenees
Higher than the great Carpathians
Higher than Augustine's destiny
Up to the little feet of my love.

The Spring was like brass and fire
As I walked through the streets
But there was no one to speak to me
No one whom I could tell of my love.

The sun tore at the roots of the lilac tree
It flung its crystal bullets against my face
No one will know that I have loved so much
Or remember my love or me or the golden
lemons.

Elizabeth Berridge

Judas

Spurn not the bitter honey of her hair
O Judas.
(Coarse, cloudy and luxurious
Falls the enveloping hair of Mary).
Neither let your narrow soul
Turn inwards, hating her—
And Him who permits it.

Reckon not the cost of alabaster
O Judas.
Of precious flowing perfume
From the hands of Mary.
Mary of Magdala, the shamed one.

For in that moment you betrayed Him
O Judas.
Jesus of Nazareth, the serene one.
Gaping incredulous as the woman
Loosed her bitter flood of honey
Over the tired feet of the Master.

And from that dark night on
You fled Him.
The gracious one, full of forgiveness.
Shocked by the waste
And His non-recoiling.
From Mary of Magdala, used by many.

Not for the thirty silver pieces
Nor the fear of war
And the Roman legions
But the comforting tide of bitter honey
Were you betrayed,
O Jesus.

Leslie Phillips

The Worn Doom

Mirrored in me an agonised emblem
Marred in the morning of sorrow
A phantom message of death rekindled.
Stumbling and strong the image entices
The innocent deep in their harbour,
Hard in the dawn-won day,
Drawn like the curling leaves
To the wind's dry corner.

Their birth unasked like the streak
Of a kingfisher startled,

Stirring the river's rushes.
They will lose in their hearts
The days of the swallow and learn
The terrible grip of an eagle's talon
Poised at the point of dying,
Where the young gather for glory.

For the worn doom woven and torn
They bellow unbroken and eager,
Meeting with flesh the metal clash,
Molten and fire-ringed-round.
The sand's fast crystal powders,
Smoothing the plain and pyre,
Where the sacred survivors, fearing
In ruin, shall raise mad marble.

Edward Eliul

Elegy in a Disused Churchyard

Because your meekness is not meritorious
the grave's best yawn outshines the grandest epic.

Because you sped on tides which towed your speeding
there is floundering on land as in an ocean.

Because you left for heirlooms your trite instincts
a gasp for life breathes in fear of the canker.

Because your eyes tore nature's scene to tatters
your daughter's soul is loosely pieced together.

Because your love gathered no moss in rolling
her love luxuriates in the bed you died in.

Because you strove for death which scorned your effort
the posthumous shall crown the brittle heroes.

Because you scamped his flesh your son is fearless
in his maturity of skull and cross-bones.

Robert Herring

Coal Star

Always to cold a man will drag himself.
Fall'n in one pond of frozen fire, can reach
(ice-dripping) centigraded stream.
Through fifty miles will shun warm friendly fern,
staggering to light that shines but does not warm.

Never to fire, to door. To window always will,
whose warmth is only glass-glazed mirror-wick.
Never to trees, those soothing combs in hair
long lank—but shoots to star between,
bright, sharp and cold as teeth. No lips, no kiss
lure like the handshake of a fur-cold eye.

John Ormond Thomas

I, at the channel

I, at the channel of my windowsill
flow down the circles of the coloured pool
and cut strange steps into the will of hope
that rises in the huge misshapen wave.

Out of the weakness of my regular arms
the stringent tides stretch out the body, tie
the moving of the sea at my fingertips
to the student trees at the breast of the earth I
sucked.

The rains of sufferance and the knives' return
come to my head and pin the hair
flat to the sea and to the water's edge:
and wicks of time soak slowly to their grave.

And at my feet my coffin weight of love
rots in the canvas shroud, where starfish move
vague in the light, between the native boats,
that plumbs the greenness of my tropic sea.

And through the rotting of my seaweed side
I feel the stitching up my quiet limb
ease with the thought of slipping now away
to peace. A great beginning.

Robert Greacen

Darkness O Darkness

Darkness O darkness pours on your costume
Black as the crêpe on the knocker of death,
Nestles around you, sets like a jelly,
Absorbs to its core your rhythm of breath.

Dangling in conscious mind, dangling uneasily,
You dazzle, brighter than any electric star,
Lovelier than hoar-frost in a poet's garden,
Holding my love and will at constant war.

Darkness O darkness falls on me, falls
Like snow flakes in a nursery story,
For you, my darling, are being followed
By an enemy that is shadowy and wary.

Richard Grindal

Poem

Yes my love, forget your metaphysic;
I will too. Three fingers worth of passion
excite my curiosity; the Bloom
within me, coffin-careless, yearns
for madrigals. The white husk spins
down the resolving insect way,
the Dedalus dance of death.

And they have died a thousand deaths, those bones
lipped with the succulent furrow, sinking
leech-curled in the heat of night. How often
will terror twist the juice chord? clutch
the cod's-eye, which you as a boy
threw round the room, and sink
five fathoms soundlessly.

John Atkins

Poem

In a ragged coat, trailing arms along the foreshore,
He clambered slowly through the soft, unhostile beachgrass.
The sand moved gently beneath his flattened arches,
And the grey trembling edges sank, and chattered into song.

Then he groped with his fingers and found the rusting iron,
Bent and buckled freely, half-hidden in the sand;
As he urged the metal upward, it snapped and gleamed with venom,
And he stood like a mute with a penny in his hand.

Then he dragged his feet to the playful, trickling water,
Leaving irksome prints in the heavy, shelving shore,
And the water rushed inwards and broke down the traces.

Yet the sides of the hillocks lay still, unfeeling, broken,
And a light noise of whispering ran through their foundations,
While the errant beam of metal pointed upward in surprise.

Porter Forrester

Ellismere Idyll

The winds of wrath wind round Ellismere head in the dead days,
Dragons roaring across the beauty of the still waters.
Are we to stop, to remain thinking of the seven early daughters
And their husbands murdered in wrath in a furious wind,
A wind of Babylon blowing through mystic castles and catches:

Ellismere, Ellismere, your beauty watches
The eyes of Venus,
Open and sweet on the great whirlpool of your face, a scarf of sea
Stretching between the mountains.
And then the wind drops, and the soft willows
Purr in the last leavings of wind, and we, the adventurers
Fall back on calm days.
We grow used to the stillness, the fine summer air,
Cold and crisp, as if throughout this holy idyll
A strong boy walked over the waters.
There is no murder here in the clean wind
Blowing quietly through the sedges.
Here we forget the old adage
That the wind blows nobody good.
The flood is over and a whole peace takes the lover's mind,
Wrapping his lady from the wind,
And from legend.

Then upon your vast surfaces, lakes of sorrow, where the winds scud
The white swans drift with plashing feet,
Paddling serenely. The big dragonflies
Whizz. The fires in the furze are not yet lit, the day
Of reckoning is not yet dawned, the red husbands
Ready for the storm to close their eyes, are steady sawing
The thick logs in the wood.

Wind of wrath, wrathwind, seawind, what desolate splendours
Will you blow down from this idyll for a judgement day?

The huntsmen ride, the hounds roar,
The eighty hungry witches ride on your withering tides,
Trees fall, rocks groan: and stillness comes again on your quiet face.

Marion Peacock

Morning, Noon and Night

She was a fountain
Broken in pieces by the sun's bright hands:
She was scrawled vertically
In silver pothooks and crystal strands.
Antemeridian was the day's curve,
Too green for reason or rhyme
And the mind yawningly thought of the comfort
Of inns and opening time.

There are allotments
Where old men stick beans in naves and spires
Woodsmen cut hazel wands when the sap falls,
When red leaves are the wood's fires—

It was always night when she came
So she planted white flowers,
Asterisks, triangles, circles of wandering hours,
Floral searchlights clumped in rounds making
Feathery fête,
While the wind extended his chilly handshake
Over the gate.

Reginald Moore

City Man 1942

Going from door to door of the big houses
Broken door to broken door of the empty places,
Stepping upon weedy gravel and pressing silent bells,
I am compiling a directory of ghosts:
Madness employs me thus.

Have you met madness? A strange shadow.
Always a craving deeper than desire,
Always a traveller beckoning to lands
So grass-cool, so planted with peace,
That the dance of frenzied death
Seems holy and devout,
Imps are angels and the rest are lost.

And now madness employs me
Stepping over glass and splinters and bits of brick
And howls in my throat
When, at the elegant door,
Stale air breathes on me
Through cracks, and the silence sings.
Dust is life in these places, behind these doors;
I can hear the ants crackling in the hall
And through the letter-slit see black beetles
On the stair: the ceiling sags.

My no-names are many and it is joy.
Gone are the days when hedges could terrify
The wanderer in the rain, and sleekly drip
Upon beggars.

J. H. S. Kent

Pleasure of Dawn

Spread, spread this silence over all the world,
That comes in company with vision, dawn:
A marsh, godless, lovely marsh that melts
In mists, and sprawls, and crouches, cries
As white wings echo an escaping thought;
Dull and immense and motionless, a sea
Out of whose depths primeval forms might grow
If noise paused long enough, the sun decayed;
Mud more remote and mystical than man,
Spreading and creeping in the crooked squares
Squashed between house-roofs, road-ends, chimnies,
Making a factory a lonely fort:
Dawn like an island that renews our longing
Lost for romanticism loved in childhood,
Marsh-dawn, mud-dawn, spreading flood-dawn,
Dawn like the petals of a rose surrounding
Silent, un-noise-hurt, shrinking morning:
Dawn evanescent, dream that breaks with vision,
Spread, spread this silence, spread this silence, dawn.

Manifesto from the Catacombs

Words bind the wing and bring down the feather into the heart. Poetry lights the grave of the dead and sings in the dark corners of the living mind. But the poet is a strange hunted beast, gentle and deadly, hilarious and morose. He lives by means of unseen pictures where the ordinary man sees only bread and stones, hears words trailing like clouds in the silence of the night, haunting, forcing, fearing the thing the plain man never even suspects, but knowing in his bones all the extent of human suffering and hope over an ocean a continent away.

So sing like the inconsequent bird in the shell shattered tree. Fly like the mind's free arrow to the unembittered sun. And though they plan the extinction of all hope of the poor man's real desire—peace and a dream of little things—they cannot ruin the high hills, nor stop the tides, nor turn the wind. Someone must sing the ache of a woman for her home, the loss of a bright new life for a half understood cause.

There must be flowers at the end of the world and the last day must have its sunrise. No government can ever quite stifle the fine fresh feeling of a clear dawn, the warm ray of sunlight after rain, the voice of a loved woman calling from another room. It would be easy to make out a long list of things never touched by forms, controls and orders in council, acts of parliament and military law. As the universal darkness of servitude to the unreasoning will of some senseless state necessity falls upon all mankind the poet's place is clearer and more urgent. He alone can preserve the note of the lark for an imprisoned multitude, see the moon clearly in the bottom of a well.

WREY GARDINER.

(From THE ONCE LOVED GOD to be published shortly).

REVIEWS

Auden and After by Francis Scarfe, (*Routledge* 8/6d.).

This is an unique book—the only comprehensive study covering the field of poetry during a particularly chaotic period. It is as notable as it is rare to find acute criticism combined with honest and profound sympathy for such diverse work: and, above all, there is no hint of the chronic bad temper and personal spite that invalidates most modern poetic criticism.

In his introduction, the author explains the analytic method employed, quoting T. S. Eliot:—

> Everyone talks of Poetry, but no one offers us a poem.

Mr. Scarfe's training in French literature accounts, of course, for the predilection for *lectures expliquées.*

There are ten separate essays on individual poets—Day Lewis, Auden, Spender, Macneice (whose name is given consistently as Macneice), Grigson, Prokosch, Allott, Dylan Thomas, Barker and Julian Symons. These essays—each complete in itself—are not so isolated as one would expect: there is a continuous trail in the exposition of both general and particular points, so that a happy fusion is created and the reader's interest is sustained throughout. Of Auden, naturally, he has most to say—I say *naturally,* because I agree with Mr. Scarfe that Auden, despite his limitations of treatment and whatever his own stature, is a poet of front-rank historic importance. He writes:—

> The important point about Auden's style is that, for good or ill, he has tried to write a poetry very close to common speech, and that he has succeeded . . . . one sees increasingly that he is quite incapable of orthodoxy of any kind."

True enough: but surely that is equally applicable to

every generation, which reaffirms the "common speech" basis, and is eventually most successful in the very failure to achieve its purpose. Dealing with Spender, the analytic method is highly successful, though sometimes a bit "schoolmasterish." One of the most satisfying of Mr. Scarfe's attitudes of good sense and good criticism is demonstrated in the latter part of this essay—simply his insistence on judging poems primarily for their *poetry* and not for their politics or religion, or alleged lack of either, which is so often the criterion by which a piece of verse stands or falls.

Surrealism and the Apocalypse have rather a thin time—by space allocation at any rate. Again, the estimate is fair, cool, level and discerning. Most people will agree with him that the two outstanding writers of the Apocalyptic movement are Henry Treece and Nicholas Moore (not including Comfort's poetry in their achievement, since he is a latecomer and hasn't yet had group publication): the others too often tend to give an outsider the impression that the philosophic build is an ad hoc structure—especially in the case of Hendry, whose rather heavy-handed Scots style is too hard going for the actual creative work to his credit. There is a good valuation of Treece's rich texture and blatantly romantic imagery and adequate witness to Moore's spontaneity and tender, lyrical purity.

But, despite the interlarding of the "one poet" studies with reasoned comment, the latter sections (*Observations On Poetry and War, A Letter On Poetry, A Personal Statement* and *The Liberation of Poetry*) contain the most assured and mature criticism. One is tempted to assume that Mr. Scarfe's greatest defect may possibly be a certain error of the heart (and therefore very pardonable) in possessing an outsize measure of indulgent sympathy for colliding viewpoints. Poetry, at bottom, is the man himself and why not say so, is his contention—and the only possible contention. Too much bunk has been talked by too

many for too long about *The Poet* —that *The Poet* is a misfit, that *The Poet* is a crank and an egotist and so on.

> A poet is just a man who writes poetry. That is where the nineteenth century went wrong, in thinking he was something more than a man. We cannot accept Freud's idea of the poet as a freak. It is just as peculiar to make poems as it is to make tables or chemicals.

So runs the letter to Tambimuttu. In these and similar statements the sophisticated reader would see triteness, superficiality and superfluity: on the contrary, Mr. Scarfe hits out, takes an off chance and puts into print a good deal of valuable matter that badly wants much saying. You will recall from Spender's *Life And The Poet*—

> Nor can the poet himself write what he may believe to be the most correct, the most true, the greatest poetry which he can imagine being written. He can only write the poetry which the inclination of his own being—that is to say his tastes in life, as apart from his tastes in morals, politics and literature—permit him to write. He must have, above all else, the courage to be himself.

Auden And After is a spirited venture in the art of appreciation. If it did nothing else, it would serve to show that there is at least one of the younger (not the *youngest)* poets who has an outlook formed by sense and sensibility. It will do a splendid service if, in reaching the common reader, it convinces him to risk boredom or insult in turning to the poetry of 1930-1941: and it will be a salutory reminder to all poets of their duty in this, their lunatic world. Mr. Scarfe sums up well in the last sentence:—

> The poet will heal the wounds of humanity only by reaching deeply into himself, and by expressing his inner vision with fearless sincerity.

ROBERT GREACEN.

The Van Pool, by Keidrych Rhys (*Routledge* 2/6*d.*)
Soldiers This Solitude, by Alan Rook (*Routledge* 2/6*d.*)
The Iron Laurel, by Sidney Keyes (*Routledge* 2/6*d.*)
Wounded Thammuz, by John Heath Stubbs (*Routledge* 2/6*d.*)
Predicament, by Maurice Lindsay (*Alden Press, Oxford* 2/-.)

In the first four of these books, one might almost be reading the dissociated qualities which would go to make up the individuality of a single poet. By that I mean that if the attributes of all four poets could be combined in a single writer, one would have something like great poetry. As it is, there are four separate voices, intensely individual, immature, having a measure of romanticism and lyrical impulse in common. Of the four, Rook is the most conscious poet, in the sense that he seems to take most trouble, and Keyes is probably the most successful in his total effect. His work in the Oxford anthology was outstandingly better than the rest. Stubbs is courageous in his use of colour. Rhys has interpreted the experience of the ordinary soldier, his miserable inaction, his frustration, and the minor heart-burnings which make up life in an army that doesn't fight. In this he is more personal and forceful than Alun Lewis or any of the others who have attempted the same thing. His work is irregular and shapeless but adult. The others are publishing while in pursuit of a style. Keyes, in a good many poems, has found it. In reading the work of this Oxford group one is conscious of a totally different background-landscape to that of the Cambridge group who centred round Moore and Mark Holloway—it is as if one were looking at a half-traditionalist, half-surreal scene through a sort of white baroque facade. The scenery is inchoate and symbolic, dream-scenery like the scenery of Treece or Hendry, but explicit and imposed upon the real

naturalistic scenery of an older romantism

. . . . "The terracotta town
dropped on the hill, generates circles, spreading
to the horizon: rings of green and grey
granite or yellow of mimosa thickets . . . . " (*Keyes*)

but where one finds pastiche it is of Keats, not of Dylan Thomas:

"Brim them with sweet new milk and stone-ground flour
Meddled with filmy must of sanguine wine,
And honey though the bees
Now seek their torpid cells . . ." (*Stubbs*)

The synthesis is important. A return to naturalism in some form goes with every romantic movement not the unintelligent naturalism of the Monro Georgians, who inclined to it as an exercise in descriptive writing, but providing for the undiscovered country some sort of scenic background. In the naturalistic passages in Keyes and Stubbs the scenery is there, recognisable, but altered just so much as scenery in a dream is altered, so that it acquires meaning as well as form. Stubbs is feeling about in the manners of Keats, Sitwell, and many others, to find some enriched diction which will provide the direct antidote to the sterilised mot-juste poetry of the imagists. Rook is remarkably eloquent in places, especially in his by now celebrated *Dunkirk Pier*. If this eloquence lacks colour, and Stubbs in his colour is too derivative and lifts whole phrases, it is no reflection on the writers, who have seen the need for a break with the jejune, and that terror of passage-writing which the Georgians produced. There is a definite movement here. One cannot fit Rhys into it, because he is too full of the interpretation of his own experience to be over-concerned with technique. His realism is entirely convincing, often moving, and uncontrolled only when indignation another genuinely poetic emotion which has been banished quite need-

lessly of late—asserts itself. With the exception of Rhys, and perhaps of Rook, whose poetic development may not go very much further than his *Dunkirk*, it would be unfair to compare these books with the work of writers like Watkins or Treece who have had time to solve the problems of relating experience to technique. All four books are certainly to be bought, as indispensible to an understanding of poetry as it will be.

Lindsay's work is on a different plane, as it is related far more closely to the intellectualism of Allott and the earlier Mallalieu than to any new romantic tendency. One would group him, to that extent, with Tiller and Laurie Lee, though unlike them he cannot be trusted away from the purely intellectual interpretation, and his lyrical work falls down. He writes a sort of manifesto on the front flap of the pamphlet which several readings failed to make me understand, but the gist of it seems to be an intention to "clear away intellectual debris"—in other words, a measure of Allott's prophetic negativism. His poetry assumes therefore that there is a chance of social coherence for the poet and the world. None of the four Routledge poets show any sign of believing that. They have abandoned planning for intuition, outside criteria for esoteric ones. To that extent, Lindsay is the tail end of an old intellectualism, competent and sensitive, however, and able, in poems such as *Predicament* and his unnamed fourth poem, to strike as true and often as sympathetic a note as Allott himself did, while the rest to varying degrees represent a romanticism which is likely to be irrational, anarchist, and far less interested in the real world than in the landscapes of the mind. At some point these two divergent strands are likely to re-join. Of the five poets, Keyes seems most likely to synthesize them into whole poetry.

ALEX COMFORT.

Poetry In Wartime, Edited by Tambimuttu, (Faber and Faber, 6/-).

"Poetry in Wartime" is, what it claims to be, an anthology of recent verse. It is not a collection of the best war poems, nor even of the best poems written since 1939. Much of the work is dull and shapeless; but the rest is not merely good enough, it is thoroughly representative of the poetry that is being written now. It reveals, even the duller portions, that poets in the last three years have regained the courage to write as their sincerity directs, rather than as fashion or an editor dictates: and that imagination is given pride of place, and the dream and myth shown to have at least as much validity as the photograph.

The book answers, too, the absurd criticism that there is no war poetry being written. From the critical point of view whether or not a poet is in the Forces is probably irrelevant; certainly the poems which appeal most to me in this volume happen to be written by men who are in one of the Forces. Alun Lewis and Major Alan Rook contribute poems which do seem to abstract the spirit of these years. But war poetry is only a part of the poetry which is written in wartime. While there are no ivory towers, or none that are impregnable, poets such as Henry Treece and Nicholas Moore do not allow their very considerable talent to be moulded entirely by the shape of war.

An editor may have many reasons for compiling an anthology. Among the most important there are two which are apparent in most cases. Either the map of poetry is changing, or new features are being introduced "New Signatures," "New Apocalypse" etc. or the time is ripe for bringing the new map in front of a wider public. The latter reason is the one which has most prompted Mr. Tambimuttu to gather together there is not much evidence of selection for the first time a diversity of younger poets whose work deserves a larger reputation than it has yet attained. This

collection will not alter the map of poetry in any considerable degree, but it shows all the changes which have ocurred on the landscape since the beginning of the war. These are not as violent as the Apocalypse might suggest. The influence of Auden on the work of Nicholas Moore is as apparent as that of Dylan Thomas on the poetry of Henry Treece. But both these poets have something very much their own to say and have found by now a sufficiently individual way of saying it.

Faults? There are many as is inevitable in a collection of this kind. Much of the poetry is casual and even careless in technique. Much of it is still poetry in the making: (Brenda Chamberlain, Tom Scott, George Scurfield and others). Many of the poets are too verbose (James Forsyth, Herbert Corby, Hendry and others). On the other hand there is ample evidence of technical discipline:—Julian Symons' *Pub*, W. R. Rodger's *Summer Holidays*, the poems of Anne Ridler, Alun Lewis, Alan Rook and others, as well as Treece and Moore who emerge as poets who have found their place on the map.

One could quote at length to illustrate the points that have been mentioned, but this is a collection where every reader will find plenty to suit his own interprations. It is too diverse for any quotation to give an idea of the whole. Mr. Tambimuttu could have exercised greater selective powers; but he has, whatever its shortcomings, brought between the covers of this book, a representative picture of the three years since war became active again over the whole of Europe.

H. B. MALLALIEU.

No Weed Death, by Gervase Stewart (*The Fortune Press*).

Gervase Stewart's poems are like nothing else on earth, and, if only for that reason, are amusing and rewarding to read. But there is more to them than

that. For in their vices and virtues, and indeed in their content generally, they are highly revealing of the difficulties and contradictions of our time, our customs and our prejudices. Where they fail in depth, as most of them do, it is due to the hilarious dread which is the key to his character, and which reflects, I think, a fairly common attitude to the disasters of our time. It is the attitude of laughter, *because that is the only thing to do*, laughter used to meet a painful situation, and to overcome the dread that might otherwise in those circumstances be paramount. But in Gervase Stewart's poetry and in his person, also, this mixture of hilarity and fear was present in a most extraordinary degree. In his preface to this book Henry Treece gives some interesting anecdotes of Stewart as a person, and they are almost necessary to explain the peculiar qualities of his poetry. He was an extraordinary person. At Cambridge he was noted for his hilariously witty speeches in the Union debates; you would think he hadn't a care in the world: yet, for days before the making of a speech, he would literally tremble in his shoes at the prospect, and before taking an examination once, when I met him, he was in a pitiable state of dread: so much so, in fact, that in spite of his obvious cleverness and his capacity for hard work, he did fail in his examinations: *he was so afraid of failing, that he did fail*. Yet to a casual observer, he would seem to have abounding confidence in himself. Henry Treece in his foreword has an illuminating description of his ironic ability to caricature: his criticism could be devastating. I know, because he used to be devastatingly critical of my writing, and of much poetry that I admired. And at those times it would seem that he had boundless confidence in his own. Yet at other times his nervousness amounted almost to a complete lack of faith. He was a peculiar mixture of hilarious buffoon and nervous and solemn questioner. This can be seen to a certain extent in his poems. Often the hilarity, the temptation to laugh at the stupidity and unintentional knavery of

the world destroys what might have been a good poem: there is an uncomfortable feeling that this or that may have been written with his tongue in his cheek. At other times, though, he is very successful—as in several contemporary miniatures that successfully "take off" various aspects of our behaviour. "*Obituary Notice for the Squire*," "*The Reprobate*," and the poem about the child who drowned himself in a watering can, are eminently successful in this style, more successful, I think, than similar miniatures by other better-known contemporary poets. But it must be admitted that they are very obviously in this particular contemporary manner. Many of his poems are imitative, and occasionally there comes a phrase that seems to be straight out of Auden: others seem to owe much to Henry Treece. One of his most successful poems is a short poem "Fire," which was written as an entry for The Chancellor's medal at Cambridge: it must be one of the best poems that has been submitted for that prize, but, needless to say, probably much to his disappointment, he did not win it. The prize was won by a clever bit of hocus-pocus on the part of another friend of mine, who explained to me with a smile how he had arranged the atmosphere of his poem specifically to "get" the examiners with carefully concealed references and classical allusions just sufficiently obvious for the examiners to grasp and congratulate themselves on! That was not the sort of joke that would have appealed much to Gervase Stewart, though on the surface it might seem to be. About his poetry he was eminently serious. It is all the more unfortunate, therefore, that even in his best poems his sense of fun or his sense of indignation often gets the better of him, and prevents them being first-rate. But it does not prevent him from having written some excellent poems, sometimes delicate as "*For Susan*" and "*My Chinese Doll*," sometimes sombre and sustained as "*A Hill Side*," which I like one of the best of his poems, a sombre vision of destruction, perhaps exemplifying the ever-present

dread beneath his hilarity. He was very much of his time. It is a thousand pities that he should have been killed during the course of his duties in the R.A.F., as, with more discipline, his poetry might well have become very good indeed. As it is, this book is to be recommended as being at least as good as those by many poets of much more familiar name, and perhaps more interesting because of the amazing personality behind it, a personality that to me at least reflects with extraordinary intensity one of the greatest problems of our age. Gervase Stewart wrote his own epitaph in his poem "My Vanity."

He *was* vain, but he was also honest, and a most delightful person. It is a pity that he did not live to resolve the conflicts within himself, and to write the great poetry of which no doubt he was capable.

NICHOLAS MOORE.

Modern Poems from Russia, translated by Gerard Shelley, Allen and Unwin. 6/-

It would be unfair to Babette Deutsch and a few others who have done so much to make Soviet literature known outside its own country, to endorse the publisher's claim that without Mr. Shelley's latest translation Russian poetry would "remain a closed garden of delight" to the English-speaking world.

All the same, Mr. Shelley's book, coming at a time when many prejudices against Russia have been put aside, is an extremely well selected and comprehensive representation of modern Russian poetry. Its range is wide and includes fifteen poets. Perhaps Bagritzky, Asseyev and Tikhonov are the only notable omissions from the list but even so the book gives a fairly complete picture.

What puzzles me, however, is the arrangement of the collection. The poets do not appear in chronological nor in alphabetical order. This makes it

impossible to follow the development of Russian poetry, and as it has no introduction and only brief notes for some of the poets, the book is somewhat confusing.

The poets should be quite clearly divided into separate groups. To the Symbolist group belong Blok, Biely and Balmont. These in turn were followed by the "Acmeists," of whom Gumilev and Akhmatova are here represented. Out of this movement again developed the Imagists under their leader Essenin, and the Futurists with the magnificent actor Mayakovsky in the foreground. Then there are those poets, like Pasternak who, because of their independent attitude, do not fit into any school or movement; and finally the emigrés, like Merezhkovsky, who must be put into a group by themselves.

Arranged in this order, the anthology would have reflected a minor revolution which occured in Russian literary life and which is of no small importance as it mirrors the whole relationship of art and politics.

But this misleading arrangement in no way deflects from the merit of the individual translations. These, in most cases, have faithfully preserved the mood and the temperament of the various poets: the magnificent blending of romanticism and realism in Blok's great apocalyptic poem "The Twelve;" the clear-cut, precise and simple language of Gumilev; the dancing syntax of Pasternak whose perfect introspection laid him open to attack for "lacking an integral perception of reality;" the dogmatic, sloganeering verse of Mayakovsky; and above all the lyrical, melancholy note of Essenin, "the last peasant poet," as he called himself, who wrote

O Russia, land of wooden shacks!
Alone I sing your song sublime.

One is inclined to wonder how right he was.

STEFAN SCHIMANSKI

Poems of This War, Edited by Patricia Ledward and Colin Strang. With an Introduction by Edmund Blunden, Cambridge University Press 5/-

This valuable collection gives 106 poems by 36 authors, all of whom are young and not all well known. It is somewhat unequal in content but includes a number of poems of the first order and a group of writers, such as Timothy Corsellis, Clifford Dyment, David Gascoyne, Margery Smith, John Hall, Nicholas Moore, Clive Sansom and E. B. Young whose work has given me more individual pleasure than any verse I have read of late. It is grievous to realize that Timothy Corsellis has been killed in action, for *What I Never Saw*, and *Crocus Bud on a Lover's Grave* show what a rich and pregnant mind has been lost to poetry.

"Poetry is written," Edmund Blunden says in his luminous and helpful introduction "because its principle is that of the innocent eye. Its mood is that of seeing where the truth is." Indeed a large part of the joy one finds in this volume is the fresh wonder and delight, such as one feels in many of the poets of the seventeenth century, which is latent in the work of the writers I have named above. They have craftsmanship and seldom if ever, write carelessly, but their poetry has, too, the extraordinary power of wonder and revealing in a world made new. They write with fresh vision, as if for the first time conscious of the world about them.

This book is called *Poems of This War* but it is not of war I think as I read it. There is no beating of the patriotic drum, no militarism, very little irony, and but a modicum of disillusion, which is as it should be, because war in itself is not a subject for poetry nor have poets ever needed its stark sad significance in order to ponder on the strong uneven chances of ordinary life or the dark and tragic mystery of love:—

Matter is soul: the reality of man
Must move across that sky
Under the eye of heaven,
Proclaim the light of heaven
and cast its shadow.
And this remains: strictly to follow
With dignity of love and conscious knowledge
The road that cannot end,
The torment of all time, and stars in motion.

SAMUEL J. LOOKER.

The Many And The Few, by Paul Bloomfield, (Routledge 7/6d.).
The Expanding Mirror, by Peter Yates (Chatto and Windus 4/6d.).
The Cabaret, The Dancer, The Gentlemen, by Nicholas Moore (Fortune Press 6/-).

The Many and The Few has for sub-title *Culture and Destiny.* Its theme is an attempt to answer the question What influence ought Art to exercise on the destinies of society? For "art" read artists, poets, men of culture, the Few who have so often been told lately that they should identify themselves with the Many. Mr. Bloomfield's conclusions are so important in this age of mass thinking that the book is well worth buying alone for the refreshing defence of the poet and artist against the vulgarity and philistinism of the snob, intellectual or other. Those who take their ideas from the pages of the duller weeklies will perhaps not agree with the many intelligent things he has to say.

Art is the captivation of a public. It transcends all ideologies. It is truth alone that artists blurt out, inconveniently enough sometimes. They reveal the living thing inside our hearts, superior to all gadgets and by-laws. The last chapters are the most illuminating with his diagnosis of trends and discussion of the artist's place in society, admitting that the main good in life is confined to what is spontaneous and unacknowledged.

The two books, both of verse, remaining on this list are very different in every possible way from each other except in their worthiness of the reader's notice. Mr. Yates writes carefully, he is a cold chiseller of a monument which is meant to outlast its time. There is something calm and ageless in these poems as of movement arrested in the stone or bronze of the statue. They are cerebral, sculptural and sometimes very musical, though often he makes too much of internal assonances in short lines, a trick he should be careful to prune. Absorbed with the problem of man in time and space his lines are always thoughtful but sometimes flat and monotonous. One reads on without the lyric lift or complete captivation of the mind, though many of the poems shine with a sort of banked down internal fire which may some day burst into flame. This is a first book but we shall hear more of this painstaking and balanced craftsman.

Nicholas Moore is associated with Henry Treece as an Apocalyptic but he is first of all an individual, so individual in fact that each book he publishes seems to show us a different aspect of himself. It has been said that his best work is to be found in *A Wish In Season* (Fortune Press), that all the rest is just over production. Perhaps his well wishers should present him with that flower of our civilisation, gilded, painted, or plain, the waste paper basket, salvation of many a good poet's reputation. *The Cabaret, The Dancer, The Gentlemen* contains in my opinion a greater variety, an easier movement and a deeper note than any of the other volumes I have seen. And I get more *pleasure* reading these poems than any of the younger poets' work. He has in abounding quantity what so many of them lack, the lyric impulse, spontaneity and feeling, And that brings us to Mr. Bloomfield's contention that art is captivation, captivation of a public, which is the reason why, in spite of his faults Nicholas Moore has a growing one and deserves it.

WREY GARDINER.

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